

# Tribal leaders ask for fall freeway vote

By Doug Murphy  
Staff Writer

After months of rumors and speculation, it appears that the Gila River Indian Community may be preparing to hold a community-wide vote on the South Mountain Loop 202.

Gov. Williams Rhodes said through a spokeswoman that he wants a community vote because of all the attention the freeway has generated.

According to tribal member Nathaniel Percharo a vote could come as soon as November.

"There is some good talk going on," said Percharo, a supporter of a freeway south of Pecos Road on Indian land.

But a freeway south of Pecos Road may not eliminate all the noise and pollution concerns that freeway opponents have pointed to.

"Watch what you wish for, because you might get it," said Laurel Arndt last week.

One immediate issue would be the lack of input on freeway design by Ahwatukee Foothills residents if the Loop 202 were built on Indian land.

According to ADOT, when the Loop 101 was built

**more Tribal, see page 3**

## Tribal

from page 1

on the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community neighboring Scottsdale had no input on the freeway's design.

"That's pretty logical," said Shannon Wilhelmsen, ADOT's director of community involvement, because the freeway was being built on tribal land, not Scottsdale land.

But before freeway design becomes an issue the proposal must jump several hurdles.

In 2000 the tribal council passed a resolution opposing a freeway on community land, which is still the official position.

Now, to get on the ballot, the tribal council must first approve the

proposal.

Then it has to get voter approval, where there is no guarantee that it will pass.

"We were taught our land is very sacred and never to sell it," said Priscilla Antone, who lives near Komatke.

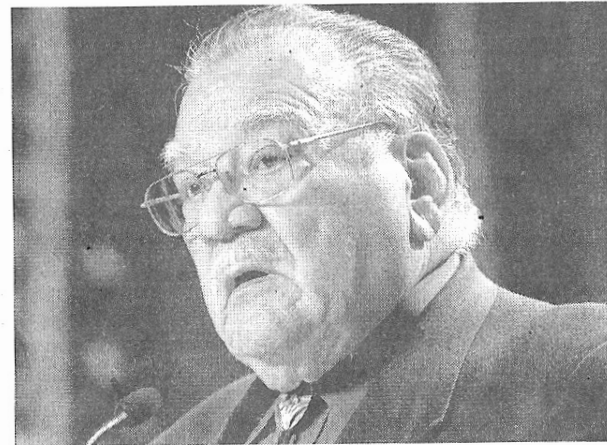
"We have the same cancers as a lot of you.

We don't want pollution. We do care about air quality. We care about noise. We are human beings," Antone said.

At one time the Gila River Indians occupied millions of acres from South Mountain to Florence and Casa Grande. Today, the reservation is down to

373,000 acres and is surrounded by growing communities in Maricopa and Pinal counties and will never grow any larger.

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File photo/AFN

**Governor Williams R. Rhodes of the Gila River Indian Community says he favors a vote on whether to allow the South Mountain Loop 202 on tribal lands.**